

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W
----- 000372

O R 111247Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2351

INFO AMEMBWSSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 0101

EXDIS

EO 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PFOR, IS, LE, SY

SUBJECT: LEBANON AND SYRIA

REF: A. TEL AVIV 0134; B. BEIRUT 0328

1. SUMMARY: AMONG FACTORS PROMPTING ASAD'S OFFER TO FRANGIEH OF MILITARY ASSISTANCE IS GROWING SYRIAN CONCERN FOR ITS OWN SELF-DEFENSE. INTENSIFICATION OF ISRAELI ATTACKS IN SOUTH LEBANON WORRY SYRIANS WHO STRONGLY SUSPECT ISRAELIS INTEND OCCUPY LEBANESE TERRITORY AND USE IT AS CORRIDOR FOR FUTURE ATTACK ON SYRIA. SYRIA'S SELF IMAGE AS PROMOTER OF ARAB SOLIDARITY ALSO PLAYED PART IN ITS DECISION OFFER LEBANON ASSISTANCE. SECRETARY MAY WISH CITE THIS APPRECIATION OF SYRIAN APPREHENSIONS DURING UPCOMING ALLON TALKS.

2. HAVE DISCUSSED SYRO-LEBANESE JANUARY 7 SUMMIT WITH PRESIDENT'S POLITICAL ADVISOR DAOUDI, CHIEF OF STAFF SHIHABI AND YUGOSLAV AMBASSADOR PEKIC, WHO IN TURN BRIEFED ME ON HIS JANUARY 8 DISCUSSION ABOUT SUMMIT WITH FONMIN KHADDAM. ALL THREE SOURCES AGREED THAT WHEN ASAD OFFERED MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO LEBANON HE DID NOT UNDULY PRESS SUBJECT. HNONE SEEMED SURPRISED AT LEBANON'S

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REFUSAL OF SYRIAN OFFER.

3. POLITICAL ADVISOR DAOUDI STATED SUMMIT ATMOSPHERICS HAD BEEN EXCELLENT. HE AVERRED THERE WAS NO SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE BEHIND SELECTION OF JANUARY 7 AS SUMMIT DATE. FRANGIEH HAD LONG URGED ASAD TO RETURN VISIT FRANGIEH PAID TO DAMASCUS IN 1971. STATE OF SYRO-LEBANESE RELATIONS HAD NOT BEEN CONDUCIVE TO SUCH MEETING UNTIL RECENTLY, PARTICULARLY DURING EXTENDED PERIOD AFTER MAY 1973 CONFRONTATION BETWEEN LEBANESE ARMY AND FEDAYEEN. IDEA OF HOLDING SUMMIT ON LEBANESE TERRITORY HAD, HOWEVER, BEEN DISCUSSED BETWEEN BEIRUT AND DAMASCUS DURING PAST SEVERAL MONTHS. RE OFFER OF MILITARY SUPPORT, DAOUDI STATED THAT SYRIA COULD DO NOT LESS THAN MAKE THIS OFFER IN VIEW OF RECENT ESCALATION AND INTENSIFICATION OF ISRAELI ATTACKS AGAINST SOUTH LEBANON. HE ALSO CITED SIMILAR OFFERS BY LIBYA AND KUWAIT. DAOUDI NOTED PRESS REPORTS THAT LEBANESE HAD REJECTED SYRIAN OFFER OF MILITARY ASSISTANCE IN LIGHT OF US ADVICE THAT THIS WOULD INFLAME SITUATION. I COUNTERED THAT ON THIS SUBJECT LEBANESE NEEDED NO ADVICE. DIVISIONS WITHIN LEBANESE BODY POLITIC WERE A FAMILIAR CONSTANT; LONG-STANDING LEBANESE POLICY HAD BEEN TO AVOID CLOSER INVOLVEMENT IN ARAB/ISRAELI CONFRONTATION.

4. DAOUDI ASSERTED THAT SARG CONVINCED ISRAELIS HAVE PLAN TO OCCUPY SOUTH LEBANON. I REPLIED I DOUBTED ON BASIS OUR INFORMATION THERE WAS ANY CURRENT INTENTION. DAOUDI REPLIED ISRAEL ALREADY IN VIRTUALLY PERMANENT OCCUPATION OF CERTAIN LEBANESE VILLAGES AND AFFIRMED THAT ISRAEL UNQUESTIONABLY INTENDS, ON WAY OR ANOTHER, TO SEIZE PORTION OF SOUTH LEBANON AND PERMANENTLY CONTROL LITANI HEADWATERS. HE ADDED THERE WIDESPREAD ASSUMPTION IN DAMASCUS THAT USG NO LONGER SERIOUSLY STANDS BY ITS COMMITMENT TO LEBANESE TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY. I SAID THERE NO CHANGE WHATSOEVER IN OUR POLICY BUT REMINDED HIM THAT, AS FAR AS INCIDENTS IN SOUTH LEBANON CONCERNED, SYRIA WOULD NEVER FIND US ONE-SIDEDLY CONDEMNING EITHER ISRAELI OR TERRORIST ATTACKS. FOR USG, SITUATION WAS TRAGIC CYCLE OF VIOLENCE WITH ACTION OF ONE SIDE FEEDING ON THAT BY THE OTHER. THEN TOLD DAOUDI THAT ISRAELI ATTACKS WERE NORMALLY PROVOKED BY SPECIFIC FEDAYEEN INCIDENTS

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OR INITIATED ON BASIS IDF INTELLIGENCE OF IMMINENT FEDAYEEN OPERATIONS. DAOUDI ASSERTED ISRAEL ERRED IN ASSUMING NO FEDAYEEN ACTIONS WERE BEING CARRIED OUT WITHIN ISRAEL BY PALESTINIANS PERMANENTLY RESIDING EITHER THERE OR IN OCCUPIED TERRITORIES. ASKED "HOW CAN ISRAEL BLAME LEBANON FOR NAZARETH AND JERUSALEM RIOTS?", I REPLIED ISRAEL HAD NOT RETALIATED AGAINST LEBANON AFTER THOSE PARTICULAR DEMONSTRATIONS.

5. DABOUDI THEN ELABORATED ON THEME THAT DEFENSE OF LEBANON IS DEFENSE OF SYRIA. ASSERTED THERE NO QUESTION ISRAELIS HAVE CONTINGENCY PLAN TO ATTACK EXPOSED SYRIAN FLANK THROUGH LEBANESE TERRITORY. IT THEREFORE IN SYRIA'S DIRECT NATIONAL INTEREST PROVIDE WHATEVER DEGREE OF ASSISTANCE LEBANON MAY BE PREPARED REQUEST/ACCEPT.

6. COS SHIHABI IN BRIEFER COMMENTS STATED WE COULD ASSUME THAT TIMING OF SUMMIT CONFERENCE HAD NOT BEEN CASUAL DECISION "BUT REFLECTION OF DEVELOPMENTS IN BOTH COUNTRIES." HE DID NOT OTHERWISE DRAW A CONNECTION BETWEEN MAJOR INCIDENTS IN SOUTH LEBANON AND CHTAURA SUMMIT.

7. FONMIN KHADDAM TOLD YUGOSLAV AMBASSADOR PEKIC JANUARY 8 THAT SUMMIT ATMOSPHERE HAD BEEN EXCELLENT. HE REITERATED PUBLIC LINE THAT SYRIA STOOD READY TO SUPPORT LEBANON IN ANY AREA LEBANON MIGHT REQUEST. FONMIN EMPHASIZED SYRIA'S OBLIGATION TO HELP DEFEND LEBANON MILITARILY. PEKIC DESCRIBED KHADDAM, WHOM HE HAD NOT SEEN FOR PAST MONTH, AS INCREASINGLY PESSIMISTIC ABOUT PROSPECTS AVOIDING ANOTHER WAR. KHADDAM HAD OPENED CONVERSATION WITH COMMENT THAT, AS FAR AS HE COULD SEE, PLANS AIMING AT DIVIDING ARABS AND PARTICULARLY DIVIDING CAIRO FROM DAMASCUS ONTINUED TO DOMINATE THINKING OF "THOSE WHO ARE URGING STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH." KHADDAM ADDED ONLY THAT HE COULD SEE NOTHING IN THIS APPROACH FOR SYRIA BUT REAFFIRMED SYRIA INTENDED PURSUE PATH OF POLITICAL SOLUTION AS LONG AS THAT HELD ANY HOPE.

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ACTION SS-25

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2352

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AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

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EXDIS

8. PEKIC, WHO ENJOYS WIDE CONTACTS WITH BOTH SYRIAN GOVERNMENT AND BAATH PARTY HIERACHY, OBSERVED THAT KHADDAM SHARES THE INCREASINGLY WIDESPREAD SUSPICION IN THIS CAPITAL THAT ISRAELIS WILL START WAR IN THE COMING MONTHS. RESPONSIBLE SYRIANS HAVE TOLD PEKIC THEY ARE TRYING TO PLAN FOR CONTINGENCIES WHICH DID NOT ARISE IN PREVIOUS CONFLICTS. FOR THEM, ONE OF THE MOST OBSIOUS IS AN ISRAELI ATTACK ON SYRIA THROUGH SOUTH LEBANON. PEKIC CONCLUDED THAT SYRIAN OFFERS OF MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO LEBANON REFLECT SYRIA'S CONCERNS FOR ITS OWN SELF-DEFENSE.

9. COMMENT: TENOR OF COMMENTS BY THESE MEN WHO ARE EITHER THEMSELVES ACTIVE IN POLICY-MAKING OR WITH EXCELLENT ACCESS TO SYRIAN LEADERSHIP, STONGLY SUGGESTS THAT HEIGHTENED CYCLE OF VIOLENCE IN SOUTH LEBANON MAY HAVE BEEN ONE OF PRINCIPAL FACTORS BEHIND TIMING OF THE JANUARY 7 FRANGIEH/ASAD SUMMIT. PRESENT SYRIAN LEADERSHIP HAS GIVEN NO HINT IT ENTERTAINS TERRITORIAL AMBITIONS ON LEBANON WHICH IN EARLIER YEARS CAST PALL OVER RELATIONS BETWEEN THESE TWO COUNTRIES AND INHIBITED HOLDING OF A SUMMIT. NOR DOES EVIDENCE SUPPORT INTERPRETATION THAT SAAD SAW HIMSELF EMBARKING ON HIGHLY ADVENTUROUS POLICY IN OFFERING MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO FRANGPEH. ASAD

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HAS BEEN ONE OF MOST VIGOROUS SUPPORTERS OF MOVES TOWARDS ARAB UNITY AND UNDOUBTEDLY FELT HE COULD OFFER NO LESS THAN OTHER ARABS HAD ALREADY DONE. GIVEN SYRIAN PERCEPTION THAT ISRAELI POLICY AIMS AT ISOLATING SYRIA POLITICALLY WITH A VIEW TO FACILITATING AN EVENTUAL MILITARY ASSAULT ON THIS COUNTRY, ASAD'S OFFER TO FRANGIEH APPEARS A STRAIGHTFORWARD EXPRESSION BOTH OF CONCERN FOR LEBANON'S DEFENSES AND A WAY OF SHORING UP WHAT COULD BE A WEAK POINT IN SYRIA'S OWN DEFENSES. WOULD NOTE THAT SYRIANS HAVE OVER PAST YEAR BEEN STRENGTHENING ITS' GROUND DEFENSES IN AREA TO SOUTH OF DAMASCUS-BEIRUT ROAD AND THAT THEY HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN EFFECTIVE ISRAELI AIR ATTACK AT MEZZE AIRPORT LAST SPRING WHICH USED LEBANON CORRIDOR. I SUGGEST THAT SECRETARY MAY WISH SHARE THIS APPRECIATION WITH FONMIN ALLON DURING THEIR UPCOMING TALKS.

MURPHY

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